

Santa Rosa County
Emergency Services Advisory Committee
March 24, 2004
2:00 p.m.

MINUTES

Members Present:

Joe Diamond
Gerry Goldstein
Lew Oliver
John E. Reble

Chris Rucker
Tony Simmons
Don Vanderryt

Staff Present:

Sheryl Bracewell
Deb Grinde

Dave Ling

Agenda for this meeting approved as submitted.

Minutes for meeting held February 25, 2004 accepted and approved as amended.

Presentation was provided by Captain Shawn Jarrell, Jay Volunteer Fire Department, Jay, FL. The Jay Fire Department, referred to as Station 27, covers approximately 103 square miles surrounding the town of Jay. The Department responds from one (1) station located approximately four (4) miles south of Jay. There are 24 active volunteer firefighters. Ten (10) are state-certified as FF1. Nineteen (19) have completed the FF1 program. Nineteen (19) are First Responders, two (2) are EMTs, one (1) paramedic, three (3) state-certified fire instructors. They have seven (7) CPR instructors, four (4) HAZMAT technicians and three (3) HAZMAT awareness and operations level instructors.

The Department responds to approximately 200 incidents annually. These numbers are on the rise. There have been no incidents to which the members have failed to respond since 1990. In addition, they are continually dispatched to assist other districts.

Members are very active in training, both in state and in the southeast region. In many instances funds are not available for out of town training sessions and the members typically pay for these costs themselves. These costs include travel, food and lost time from work. In addition the department has held many classes for other firefighters.

Annual funding for this Department is approximately \$62,000.00. This includes the supplemental funding from the county. Approximately \$33,000.00 goes toward payments on equipment including the main pumper. Another \$12,000.00 goes toward insurance and the balance of approximately \$17,000.00 is left for operating expenses. This leaves no room for any major improvements to either the station or the equipment. It also became necessary to add the costs of new apparatus for the firefighters in the equipment loans.

Our station was built in the 70's as an airplane hangar. There is no heat or insulation in the station. Consequently kerosene is used to provide enough heat to make sure the water does not freeze during the winter months. The training room is one of the portable classrooms distributed by the school board. There are no substations and no funds available to consider such stations. Two (2) substations would provide the minimum of five (5) miles for most residences in the district.

The equipment inventory includes a 1996 pumper, a 1981 pumper, a 1985

4,000-gallon tanker, a 2001 medium duty rescue truck and a 1982 service truck. The 4,000-gallon tanker is the biggest concern. It has a 9-speed transmission that all members are not able to operate. It has a rebuilt engine and is not dependable. Some training equipment and a thermal imaging camera was purchased in 2002 with funds from a FEMA grant. It is the only thermal imaging camera in the north end of the county.

Current members have turnout gear and pagers. However, there would be no gear or pagers for any new members. The most pressing concern regarding equipment would be the age and condition of the SCBAs. All eighteen are no less than 20 years old and none meet the NFPA standards.

In closing, the first priority would be to replace the tanker with a tanker/pumper. Secondly, the replacement of the SCBAs is critical. Finally, a new station with training facilities would also be in order.

The members also believe that all departments within the county should be equal in the quality of apparatus and the quality of the equipment that is used, regardless of the size of the department or the number of calls. A structure fire is a structure fire regardless of the location; the results are still the same.

Capt. Jarrell fielded questions regarding training, brush fire responses and the activities of the department as a whole.

The greatest portion of the district is rural/agricultural. No members have DOF wild land certification as the courses run 24-40 hours each. The members have been primarily trained in structure fires. Capt. Jarrell noted that the DOF has three (3) stations that they respond from. One is on Greenwood Rd, one at the Coldwater Horse Stables and one in the Wallace area.

Discussion held regarding the replacement of the tanker with a tanker/pumper and the costs related to it.

Noted that the committee will visit the Jay Fire Department on Wednesday, April 28, 2004.

Review of Reports/Statistics

Reviewed Analysis of Emergency Calls Report for the month of February 2004.

Noted that the percentages are mostly inaccurate. A revised report will be prepared for the next meeting.

Correspondence

Reviewed copy of letter that was sent to Chief Wirth regarding the funding of additional personnel during the busy times of the

year on Navarre Beach.

Old Business

MSBU Funding

Discussion held regarding the presentation provided to the Board of County Commissioners requesting an adjustment to the fire protection rates. Chief Reble is getting positive feedback from the community, there has been some media coverage and the "Man on the Street" type column in the Press Gazette also seemed to be positive. Citizens need to contact the Commissioners regarding the pros and cons regarding the issue. L. Oliver stated that the Fire Chiefs would need to get the citizens more involved and to contact their Commissioner regarding the same.

The proposal has been sent to a sub-committee for inclusion in a review of a total budget proposal (funding study).

Chief Reble stated that the ordinance must be reviewed and voted on annually by the BOCC. S. Bracewell stated that the funding must be adopted by resolution whether it be for existing funding or new funding.

Insurance

Reviewed memo to H. Walker, County Administrator, from D. Cook, Risk Management, regarding insurance concerns.

Discussion held regarding those issues listed in the memo. Noted that the smaller departments may realize some savings but the larger ones probably would not. G. Goldstein noted that H. Walker already indicated that the fire departments would be unable to be grouped with the county employees.

Committee discussed methods utilized in Escambia County. Discussion ensued regarding volunteer vs non-profit vs unpaid employee vs volunteer chiefs! Noted that the volunteer chiefs report to the county Fire Chief in Escambia County, that boards govern the non-profit corporations and that funding is based on need and not on location.

C. Rucker questioned what the cost factors or differences in those instances would be compared to our costs.

Chief Reble noted at this point that the demographics including the area, the density, the property values, etc., are very different from Santa Rosa County's. He also noted that the funding mechanisms are different, there are paid employees on staff and that capital expenditures are often funded through local option sales taxes.

C. Rucker asked in what status Escambia County was when they adopted their current system; he also asked if they, in fact, were in the same situation that Santa Rosa County finds itself.

Chief Reble stated that Escambia owned the fire stations, equipment, buildings, apparatus, etc and that Santa Rosa County does not.

C. Rucker then questioned whether Santa Rosa County is laying the correct foundation for where we want to be ten to twenty years from now.

Chief Reble suggested that it would be to our advantage to have other communities come in and tell us what they did to get to where they are at this point. He also pointed out that these issues were reviewed during the last task force and that the members should review their copies of those recommendations. Changes have occurred since then, but as long as volunteers service us we need to work with them. Also remember that paid staff will be expensive for the county.

Chief Reble made the recommendation that the insurance issues fall back to the SRFFA and the individual departments.

C. Rucker would like to hear from other counties regarding these issues for further enlightenment. T. Simmons agreed that this would be good for comparison reasons.

G. Goldstein noted, however, that insurance costs are one of the biggest budget items and that, if the issue is tabled, it is tabled for further study in the future by this committee.

G. Goldstein made a motion that a memo be directed to each Fire Chief telling them that efforts have been made toward the issue of the insurance costs, that we have run into some obstacles and will attempt to bring them more information regarding the costs of this budget item. Motion seconded by C. Rucker. G. Goldstein will draft the letter and submit to Chief Reble for signature. The motion passed to send the correspondence to each of the Fire Chiefs.

D. Vanderryt wondered whether it was discussed at the last SRFFA. T. Simmons advised that it was discussed. However, the savings would not be that great and the logistics of the claims would be complicated.

Water Purveyors

Chief Reble would like one or more of the local water purveyors to come in and speak to this committee regarding the maintenance of fire hydrants.

Noted that the owners of the hydrants are the water purveyors. Reviewed the various water systems in the county and noted that many are member owned and directed by The Public Service Commission (State of Florida). Unclear whether the American Waterworks Association or the Public Service Commission (PSC) write the by-laws.

Noted again that the purveyor owns the hydrant. The hydrant, though, is used by the firefighters.

Issues that need to be addressed with the purveyors include maintenance, testing, capabilities, accountability, etc.

Capt. Robert Carbonell, Midway Fire Department, addressed the committee regarding the methods used in his fire district. Capt. Carbonell compared it to a road. Upon building completion the county, or in this case the water system, owns the hydrant. The Midway FD tests approximately 800 hydrants every 6 months or two times per year. They flush them, they check the water flow, they grease them, they paint them and they contact the water department if any repair is necessary.

The City of Milton does the same for greater than 400 hydrants on an annual basis. The Jay Fire Dept does the same for approximately 27 hydrants.

Chief Reble noted that the Pace Fire Dept would have many, many hydrants and only volunteers to check and test them. This is much easier for the paid departments and the smaller districts to accomplish.

G. Goldstein noted that it may not be a major problem if, in fact, three or four of the departments already do the annual maintenance of the hydrants.

J. Diamond, Avalon VFD and committee member, noted that the committee must recognize the expense of doing these activities, the man-hours involved and the lack of communication regarding any new or damaged hydrants.

Discussion ensued regarding the fact that communication, accountability and agreements with the water departments are absolutely necessary.

G. Goldstein made a motion to learn from the departments what their capability is and what man-hours would be necessary and if they are already performing this task to determine how prolific the problem may be. C. Rucker seconded the motion. The motion is for G. Goldstein to draft a letter to be brought back to this committee in April.

J. Diamond is concerned about the lack of communication regarding interruption of service, breakdowns, new hydrants, etc. He suggests that a meeting with the water systems is in order. Discussion ensued.

The motion carried.

Chief Reble will contact Escambia County Fire Chief regarding future visits to this committee's meetings.

New Business

G. Goldstein expressed a concern regarding the budget systems and the accountability of the fire departments to the same end. He stated that a budget system and an accountability system must be put in place in order to provide valid requests for additional funds. He recommends that the software reporting systems and chart of accounts be standardized and be on-line for submission on a monthly basis to the county administrator. Mr. Goldstein is unsure how to implement this with the departments. However, he feels that this will provide the commissioners with an easier way for them to review at the county administrator's office.

Chief Reble stated that the county staff has already provided a standard format for the departments to submit their budgets. However, many have been submitted in different formats to date and county staff has accepted them in those formats.

Discussion ensued regarding the format provided by the county, the use of the same and the ability of the departments to develop these budgets electronically. Determination made that the BOCC is responsible for making this request of the fire departments.

C. Rucker suggested that this committee should be primarily focused on service/delivery (resource) issues rather than accounting issues which may fall out of the realm of this committee. He also suggested that a staff member investigate what the current statutory audit requirements might be regarding this matter.

G. Goldstein stated that the budget items should be reviewed as opposed to audited for general accounting principles. Discussion ensued.

PUBLIC FORUM

Richard Collins, 8600 Chumuckla Hwy

Would it be possible to put call statistics on the web site? This would make everyone, including the fire departments, more aware. Chief Reble will look into this request with staff and committee.

BOCC can dissolve any MSBU ordinance at will per F.S.S. Chapter 125 and does not need to consult the public.

BOCC has no interface with any water purveyors in the county.

Suggests that the water purveyor should be responsible for inspecting, maintaining or repairing the hydrants and not the fire departments.

Any citizen can request from the Insurance Service Organization that their fire district be rated or inspected. Forty percent (40%) will be water systems.

MSBU increase is good; however, homeowners have paid (for commercial businesses) since 1990 based on square footage; suggests that we look into business fire rates yet again.

Regarding audits-if the budgets are submitted in a haphazard manner then how good is the audit?

Stacia Ladue, 4910 Mulat Rd.

Would like to volunteer her services to assist with the number of new hydrants that are not communicated to the fire departments.

Two new subdivisions in the area of Quintette Rd. will have more than 1,000 hydrants and wonders who would communicate this to the depts. ; suggests that the permit dept advise the fire depts. G. Goldstein advised that there is a need to document a mechanism in order to make this occur.

Capt. Robert Carbonell, Midway Fire Dept.

May want to be careful if considering the methods used in Escambia County, as they seem to be having many problems at this time.

MSBU funds will be competitive with other divisions and may want to have separate entities or separate millage rates, e.g. City of Destin FD.

Suggested that Escambia may not be a good example.

Next meeting Wednesday, April 28, 2004

Meeting adjourned at 4:06 PM

Submitted by D. Grinde